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Notes and Opinions.

The Oral Theory of the Synoptic Problem.—It is a very true word that Rev. Arthur Wright, A.M., speaks at the opening of his article on this subject in the *Thinker* for February: "St. Paul's Epistles engrossed the attention of biblical students of the last generation. Old Testament criticism is the pursuit of the present. The Gospels remain for the future. They are unquestionably the most important of the three subjects." He then goes on to argue, as he never tires, and never ought to tire, of doing, for the oral hypothesis of the origin of the Gospels. An unusual reading of the preface to Luke's Gospels is given when he says: "It is often assumed that St. Luke asserts in the preface to his Gospel that he had read and was making use of those narratives which 'many' of his contemporaries had 'undertaken to draw up.' It seems to me that his language, when carefully examined, decidedly favors the opposite conclusion. He asserts that both they and he derived their information through tradition handed down by the regular catechists from the original eye-witnesses. He does not affirm that his precursors had actually published anything, but rather implies that they undertook the task of writing, and abandoned it." The power of the memory to retain extensive material, when employed as it was in the first century of our era, is well shown. "The fashion of the day," he says, "was to store the memory. There was an unreasoning prejudice against religious books. 'Commit nothing to writing' was a maxim of the Rabbis. Neither St. Peter nor his fellows had any literary instincts. Believing that the end of the age was at hand, they had no sense of duty to posterity." He then illustrates from the present Orient the use of oral transmission. From a Buddhist Catechism he cites the fact that their holy books were handed down orally from generation to generation. He quotes also from a paper by Professor Max Müller, who says: "At a time when writing did not exist, the human memory was infinitely superior to what it is now. People could remember an enormous amount of what we call poetry, and even prose. . . . I have had people in this room who knew by heart the whole of the Rig-Veda, which consists of more than a thousand hymns of about ten lines each, and who could take it up at any point. That is not at all an uncommon thing among educated men in India." And Archdeacon Monk, of Mid-China, is cited as reporting a school at Ning-po to which orphans are taken when ten years old. He there discovered that "the children knew the whole of the four Gospels by heart. They could be put on anywhere, and would go straight away, the beginning, middle or end of a chapter, or at the beginning, middle, or end of a verse. And it was no mere parrot-learning. They could explain in their way what they had been taught." And Mr. Wright argues:

"These examples, which I could easily multiply, will show that the memory is capable of the work which I have attributed to it, and that the men of that time and century would be likely to make use of it. But if teaching was to be carried into distant lands, a band of teachers must have been prepared and sent forth, taking St. Peter's Memoirs with them. These, I maintain, were the catechists, about whose existence and work so much incredulity has been expressed in certain quarters."

The Purpose of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.—Some two years ago Professor Harnack published in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* an article advocating the theory that the prologue to the Gospel of John is not a key to the understanding of the book in the sense that it summarizes its main ideas, but is a section prefixed to explain to Hellenistic readers that the Logos of current philosophy and the Jesus Christ of history were identical. This is, according to Harnack, the writer's contribution to the Christological problem of his time. Harnack has recently found a confirmation of this theory in the writings of Julian the Apostate. This ancient exponent of Christianity argues (*contra Christum passim*) that John alone of all the Old and New Testament writers is responsible for the doctrine of the only-begotten Son of God, who is preëxistent and the agent of creation. Harnack (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* V. i.) sums up the essential points of Julian's argument as follows: (1) Julian recognizes that the Logos of John's Gospel is not an allegory, but a distinct person, who is eternal and second God; also that Jesus, only-begotten Son, and Logos refer to the same being, and that to see the Logos is as much as to see God the Father. (2) That Julian uses without distinction the language of the prologue and of the Nicene creed, with these qualifications, that he cannot find in the prologue the doctrine of the "Mother of God," nor is the teaching that "without *Jesus Christ* nothing came into being" clearly avowed though it is insidiously implied. (3) That John is solely responsible for the deification of Jesus. (4) The prologue was written for Gentile-Christians, at a time when they were already numerous, (a) to give instruction adapted to them, (b) to prevent the suppression or perversion of the worship of Jesus. For the Gentile-Christians were already paying high honors to the graves of the apostolic martyrs and heroes. As to the structure of the prologue,—and here is the point of contact with Harnack,—Julian represents it as a drama with a climax, which is carefully prepared for and is reached in verse 17, where the God-Logos is revealed as Jesus Christ. The Evangelist saves himself from blasphemy in the prologue, by the remark, inconsistent with what he has said before, that "no one has seen God at any time."

This interpretation and criticism of the prologue, Harnack says, doubtless came to Julian out of the Neo-Platonism of the third century. At least enough hints of such an interpretation are extant to make it reasonably evident that it was not original with Julian but had some currency in the early church.

Harnack himself regards Julian's view that the purpose of the prologue to check the tendency among Gentile-Christians to worship the deceased apostles and martyrs as false and absurd, as also Julian's theory that the deification of Jesus is insidiously and surreptitiously introduced in the prologue. But he thinks that Julian was quite competent to form an intelligent opinion on the question of the literary purpose and structure of a Greek philosophico-theological production such as the prologue is, and congratulates himself on finding in so ancient a source a confirmation of his own independently suggested theory.

The Doctrine of the Trinity.—Professor L. L. Paine was led to his study of Athanasianism (which appeared in the *New World* for December, 1894,) by a conviction that the Trinitarians and the Unitarians of New England are gradually drawing together. An evidence of this growing harmony is found in the answer of Dr. Bartol to one who asked him if God exists in three persons. "Yes," he said, "and in all other persons. We are all Athanasians." A better evidence than this pleasantry of Dr. Bartol's is found in the statement of Dr. Hedge that the Nicene Council, by "its homooousian doctrine," began "a new era in human thought," and that the doctrine contains the essential truth. There is no doubt a revival of Nicene thought among the Trinitarian Congregationalists of New England, and of Hegelian thought, with its endless trinities, among the Unitarians. But it remains to be seen whether these two revivals constitute a doctrinal approach of parties separated so long so radically. Professor Paine, however, believes that a harmony may soon be established, and writes to aid it. Athanasianism, he says, is not what many of the theologians of New England suppose it to be. They suppose it to be the doctrine that the Father and Son (and by implication the Spirit, though not much is said in the Nicene Creed about the last) exist in one numerical substance or essence. But Athanasius and the other Nicene Fathers did not hold that the three exist in one numerical substance or essence. They thought of the persons as being one only because they consist of the same kind of substance, as three human beings are of one substance in this sense. Yet they rejected Tritheism with horror, and saved themselves from it by teaching that, while the three persons are of one kind of substance, and very God, the Son and the Spirit are in some degree subordinate to the Father, who is God in the absolute sense of the word. The doctrine of the numerical unity of the three persons of the Godhead was established by Augustine, who did not know Greek well, and who misunderstood the Nicene Creed and those who made it. Such, for substance, is the view of Professor Paine.

If this view of Athanasianism could be sustained, the proof would probably do but little to bring the Trinitarians and the Unitarians together. The Trinitarians base their doctrine on Scripture and Christian experience, and are interested in the Nicene Creed chiefly because it seems to them an admirable expression of what they find in both; while the interest of the Unitarians

rians in the Hegelian trinities is chiefly philosophical. But I do not think that Professor Paine has at all made good his contention. One has only to open the pages of Athanasius for one's self to see that this great leader believed in the numerical unity of the substance of the Father and Son. The question is not, How many meanings has the word "homouousios?" The question is, What is Athanasianism? The question is not, What interpretation did Eusebius and the Semi-Arians put on the Nicene Creed? The question is, What interpretation did the Nicene Fathers themselves put upon it? That Athanasianism as thus defined is the doctrine of the Father and Son existing in the one numerical substance of the Godhead, is evident on almost every page of the *De Decretis*, to go no farther. Take a few sentences: "The Bishops said that the Word must be described as the true Power and Image of the Father, in all things exact, and like the Father, and as unalterable, and as always, and as in him without division." "Bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relatively to their parents; but since the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but inseparable from the essence of the Father, and he and the Father are one, as he has said himself, and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, therefore the Council, understanding this, suitably wrote 'one in essence.'" "'I and the Father are one,' and, 'I in the Father and the Father in me,' is equivalent to saying, 'I am from the Father, and inseparable from him.'" "As the words 'Offspring' and 'Son' bear, and are meant to bear no human sense, but one suitable to God, in like manner when we hear the phrase 'one in essence,' let us not fall upon human senses and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature." Such passages abound in Athanasius, and leave no room for doubt as to his position. Augustine swept away the slight shadow of subordinationism which clung to the doctrine of the Trinity as stated by the Nicene Fathers; but the numerical unity of the substance of the Father and the Son was as clear to them as to him.

F. J.